



PRESS RELEASE
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By Sgt. Balinda O'Neal

Alaska Guardsman teaches cadets sexual assault, harassment prevention

JOINT BASE ELMENDORF-RICHARDSON, Alaska — An Alaska Army National Guardsman taught sexual assault and harassment prevention classes to Colony High School Army Junior Reserve Officer Training Corps cadets last week in Palmer.

Sgt. Monique Andrews, an AKARNG victim advocate coordinator, spent three days with the cadets teaching a modified version of the Department of Defense Army Sharp Unit Refresher training. It focused significantly on defining and identifying sexual harassment and sexual assault, defining and understanding "consent," and recognizing how to be an effective bystander.

"Many young people see everyday behaviors that could be considered sexual harassment or sexual violence but are unaware that these behaviors fall into those categories," explained Andrews. "This training involved helping teenagers identify problems, and then deciding what interventions are appropriate."

Sexual harassment is a common and serious problem for both boys and girls in American high schools. Typically, sexual violence prevention efforts have focused mainly on college-age students. However, research shows children can be exposed to sexual violence at very young ages.

"It is important to educate teens about sexual violence to increase their awareness and to assist them in developing appropriate coping strategies to effectively combat negative or unwanted behaviors if they witness them at home or in school," explained Andrews. "Developmentally, teenagers rely heavily on their peers for support far more than they do adults, so the bystander intervention portion is crucial at this age. A bystander is anyone who observes an emergency or a situation that looks like someone could use some help."

In addition to learning about recognizing harassment, as well as prevention, cadets learned steps that they can take to stop sexual harassment and assault.

"We wanted the students to understand the importance of coming forward if they are a victim," said Lt. Col. retired Butch Diotte, Colony High School's JROTC instructor. "Many of our students have told us how their friends will tell them to just deal with it and not tell anyone when they are harassed."

The class is taught annually to the JROTC cadets, but this is the first time they've had a guest instructor from the National Guard.

"We believe Sgt. Andrews did a superb job getting the point across that if you are a victim, you need to come forward and use the resources available to make sure it doesn't happen

again,” explained Diotte. “Her presentation was interactive and she used thought provoking questions and showed excellent videos. One student specifically commented on how well she modified her presentation to make it more applicable to teenagers.”

“Every student we talked to had nothing but positive comments to say about her and the way she conducted the class,” added Diotte. “The students are already asking “when is she coming back?”

Andrew will be returning to Colony High School in November to teach a drug awareness class to the JROTC cadets.

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Cutlines:

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Sgt. Monique Andrews, an Alaska Army National Guard victim advocate coordinator, is presented a coin from Army Junior Reserve Officer Training Corps cadets Wesley Schlueter, left, and Kali McCafferty, after teaching sexual assault and harassment prevention classes at Colony High School in October. (Photo courtesy Colony High School JROTC)

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Sgt. Monique Andrews, an Alaska Army National Guard victim advocate coordinator, takes a photo with Army Junior Reserve Officer Training Corps cadets after teaching sexual assault and harassment prevention classes at Colony High School in October. (Photo courtesy Colony High School JROTC)

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The Colony High School Army Junior Reserve Officer Training Corps cadets march in the State Fair Parade in Palmer August 23rd. The Army JROTC program was established in 1992 and is the only Army JROTC program in the Matanuska Susitna School District. (Photo courtesy Colony High School JROTC)